

15

claims is manifestly intended to be as broad as possible. For example, unless specifically otherwise noted, the claims reciting a single particular element also encompass a plurality of such particular elements.

What is claimed is:

1. A lubrication system comprising:

a fluid reservoir;

a housing having an interior with an inlet and an outlet fluidly coupled to the reservoir;

a fluid pump configured to pump fluid from the reservoir to the interior of the housing through the inlet; and

a fluid conduit connected between the fluid pump and the inlet, wherein the conduit includes:

an inflow portion proximate the pump and having a first cross sectional area;

an outflow portion proximate the inlet having a second cross sectional area; and

a throat between the inflow portion and the outflow portion, the throat having an exit proximate the outflow portion and a third cross sectional area less than the first and second cross sectional areas;

at least one aspiration passage extending from a source of air to a location proximate the exit of the throat, whereby fluid pumped through the fluid conduit by the fluid pump draws air through the at least one aspiration passage into the outflow portion to aerate the fluid and whereby the aerated fluid pressurizes the interior of the housing to expel fluid through the outlet and back to the fluid reservoir.

2. The system of claim 1 including:

a valve between the fluid conduit and the fluid pump;

a sensor configured to generate a signal indicative of a viscosity of the fluid; and

an actuator coupled to the valve, wherein the actuator opens and closes the valve in response to the signal from the sensor.

3. The system of claim 2 wherein the sensor comprises a temperature sensor.

4. The system of claim 2 wherein the actuator comprises a solenoid.

5. The system of claim 1 wherein the aspiration passage includes at least one aspiration port within the fluid conduit and extending from the source of air to the location proximate the exit of the throat.

6. The system of claim 5 wherein the fluid conduit comprises a single unitary body.

7. The system of claim 5 wherein the fluid conduit includes:

a first member having the inflow portion and the throat; and

a second member coupled to the first member and having the outflow portion.

8. The system of claim 7 wherein the at least aspiration port is provided in the second member.

9. The system of claim 7 wherein the first and second members extend opposite to one another.

10. The system of claim 9 wherein one of the first and second members at least partially receives the other of the first and second members.

11. The system of claim 10 wherein the throat and the outflow portion are separated by a gap therebetween.

12. The system of claim 11 wherein the at least one aspiration port terminates at the gap.

13. The system of claim 5 wherein the at least one aspiration port terminates at the outflow portion.

16

14. The system of claim 5 including:

a step radially extending from the throat to the outflow portion at a junction of the throat and outflow portion, wherein the aspiration port extends proximate the step.

15. The system of claim 5 including at least four and less than eleven equally spaced aspiration ports.

16. The system of claim 15 including at least six and less than nine equally spaced aspiration ports.

17. The system of claim 5 wherein throat as an internal diameter C and wherein each aspiration port has an internal diameter of between about 0.5 C to about 1.0 C.

18. The system of claim 5 wherein the inlet portion has an internal diameter D and wherein the throat has an axial length between about 0.5 D and about 3 D.

19. The system of claim 5 wherein the fluid to be pumped by the fluid pump has a molecular diameter and wherein the throat has an internal diameter at least 100 times the molecular diameter.

20. The system of claim 5 when the fluid conduit has a Reynolds Number of at least 250.

21. The system of claim 1 including:

a first member having an inflow portion and a throat;

a second member having an outflow portion; and

a third member supporting the first and second members opposite one another.

22. The system of claim 1 wherein the air passage includes a gap between the throat of the first member and the outflow portion of the second member.

23. The system of claim 1 wherein the air passage includes a gap between the throat and the outflow portion and at least one aspiration port extending from the source of air to the gap.

24. The system of claim 1 wherein the inflow portion, the throat and the outflow portion are coaxial.

25. The system of claim 1 wherein the housing encloses a work vehicle axle.

26. The system of claim 1 wherein the fluid conduit mounts to the housing.

27. The system of claim 1 wherein the source of air comprises an air conduit extending between the aspiration passage and the fluid reservoir.

28. A fluid conduit for use in a lubricating system having a fluid reservoir, a housing providing an interior, and having an inlet and an outlet fluidly coupled to the reservoir, and a fluid pump configured to pump fluid from the reservoir to the interior of the housing through the inlet, the conduit comprising:

at least one member configured to be fluidly coupled between the pump and the inlet of the housing, the at least one member having an inflow portion having a first cross sectional area, an outflow portion about the axis having a second cross sectional area, a throat between the inflow portion and the outflow portion, the throat having an exit proximate the outflow portion and a third cross sectional area less than the first and second cross sectional areas, and an aspiration passage extending between a location proximate the exit of the throat and a source of air, whereby fluid pumped through the fluid conduit by the pump draws air through the aspiration port into the outflow portion to aerate the fluid and whereby the aerated fluid pressurizes the housing to expel fluid from the interior of the housing through the outlet and back to the fluid reservoir.

29. The fluid conduit of claim 28 wherein the at least one member comprises a single unitary member including the inflow portion, the outflow portion, the throat and the aspiration passage.